

Descendents of Pioneers in School Desegregation Receive Congressional Gold Medal

September 8, 2004

Washington — Descendants of three leaders in the struggle for equal educational opportunities received, on behalf of their ancestors, Congressional Gold Medals today to mark the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda, the medal was bestowed posthumously to Reverend Joseph A. DeLaine, Sr., Harry and Eliza Briggs, and Levi Pearson in recognition of their contributions as pioneers in the effort to desegregate public schools.

School desegregation evolved from efforts spearheaded by Reverend DeLaine to gain bus transportation for African American children of Clarendon County, South Carolina. The request was denied and Levi Pearson subsequently filed a lawsuit. Pearson's case was dismissed on a technicality, which led to the filing of *Briggs v. Elliot*, the first of five school desegregation cases. The five cases were later combined to become the landmark case *Brown et al v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas et al*, in which the United States Supreme Court ruled that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' was unconstitutional.

Authorized by Congress under Public Law 108-180 and struck by the United States Mint, the medals' obverse was designed by United States Mint sculptor-engraver Charles L. Vickers. The inscriptions "BRIGGS V. ELLIOTT" and "Our Trust Is In God" are centered above the portraits of Reverend DeLaine, Harry and Eliza Briggs and Levi Pearson. Two cabbage palmettos, the state tree of South Carolina, flank the portraits under which "BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION" is inscribed.

The reverse of the medals, designed by United States Mint sculptor/engraver Donna Weaver, features a rendition of the goddess Justice. To the right of Justice, "Honoring the Pioneers and Petitioners from Clarendon County, South Carolina" is inscribed. "They proved that segregation in education can never produce equality and that it is evil that must be eradicated," a partial quote from Judge J. Waties Waring's dissenting opinion and "ACT OF CONGRESS 2003" are also inscribed on the medal.

Customers interested in purchasing bronze duplicates and miniature bronze replicas of the gold medals are invited to visit the United States Mint website at www.usmint.treas.gov or call the toll-free number, 1-800-USA-MINT (872-6468). The 3-inch duplicate bronze medal will be available for \$38.00 and the 1½-inch miniature bronze replica will sell for \$3.00. A presentation case is also available.

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